

# Philippine News

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## NaFFAA bats for full vets equity as U.S. Congress studies health benefits bill

### HR 4904 just a step to full equity, says Rep. Filner

The National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NaFFAA) vowed to push for full equity for Filipino World War II veterans after a congressional committee held a hearing on HR 4904, the "Health Care for Filipino World War II Veterans Act," in Washington D.C. last June 13.

Prior to the hearing, the word was that the House Veterans Affairs Committee would take up HR 491, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act. However, it turned out to be a hearing by the Sub-Committee on Health and it focused only on HR 4904, sponsored by Rep. Filner (CA).

HR 4904 provides for VA Health Care for 11,000 US-based eligible Filipino veterans; Dependency Indemnity Compensation for widows of US-based eligible Filipino veterans; and full service connected compensation and burial benefits for new Philippine Scouts based in the US.

Concerned over the limited scope of HR 4904, Col. Emmanuel V. de Ocampo, President of the Veterans Federation of the Philippines exhorted NaFFAA and other veterans groups "not to drop the ball" on HR 491, also sponsored by Rep. Filner and Benjamin Gilman (NY), which would grant full benefits to veterans.

NaFFAA Executive Director Joe Montano moderated a press briefing, participated in by Rep. Filner and Rep. Randy "Duke" Cunningham (CA) at which both vowed to work for full equity.

Rep. Filner acknowledged the limited scope of HR 4904: "HR 4904 does not accomplish everything. H.R. 491, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act does that, and the passage of H.R. 491 is the ultimate goal.

"But H.R. 4904 is a significant step. It will provide access to health care for Filipino veterans in the United States, many of whom are ill and desperately in need of assistance. Coupled with the Secretary's promise to provide \$500,000 of medical equipment each year to the Veterans Memorial Hospital (VMMC) in the Philippines, we can begin to address the injustices inflicted by Congress in 1946."

The \$500,000 annual aid was confirmed by Secretary Anthony J. Principi of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Principi told the Committee that Section 1731 of



Filipino World War II veterans staged "The Second Death March" to the White House during the 1st National Empowerment Conference in August 1997 that mandated the establishment of NaFFAA. Top photo shows Greg Bayani, then 71, being hauled away by Washington police after he and other veterans chained themselves to the White House fence (Photos by Eric Lachica).

Title 38 authorizes President George W. Bush to assist the Philippines in providing medical care and treatment for Commonwealth Army veterans and new Philippine Scouts.

In another testimony, Richard Weidman, Director of Government Relations, Vietnam Veterans of America, said: "America has a covenant with the Filipino WW II veterans. I use covenant, because it is deeper than a contract. It is deeper than a promise."

Among those who testified in support of the veterans were Philippine Ambassador to Washington Albert del Rosario, Hollywood personalities Lou Diamond Phillips and Fritz Friedman; Patrick Ganio, President of the American Coalition for Filipino Veterans; Atty. Lourdes Tancinco, President, San Francisco Veterans Equity Center; Resty Supnet, President, Filipino World War II Veterans Foundation of San Diego County; Susan

Maquindang, Executive Director, Filipino-American Service Group; and General Tagumpay Nanadiego, former Special Presidential Representative, Embassy of the Philippines.

Other congressional officials who appeared at the hearing were Rep. Benjamin Gilman (NY); Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (CA); Rep. Patsy Mink (HI); Rep. Juanita Millender-McDonald (CA); and Rep. Robert Underwood (Guam).

Statements for the record were delivered by Sen. Barbara Boxer, Rep. Barbara Lee, and Rep. Nancy Pelosi, all of California.

The committee hearing was chaired by Rep. Jerry Moran (R-KS), and then midway by Rep. Cliff Stearns (R-FL). Other members of the Subcommittee on Health who were present were Rep. Lane Evans (D-IL), Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), and Rep. John Boozman (R-AR).